GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH OUR PRESIDENTS

By GEORGE H. PICARD

VII---Our Presidents as Orators.

John Adams - The man seemed lifted out of himself.

THE gift of oratory, the power to hold and thrill the multitude by the lure of speech, was possessed by at least two of our Presidents—Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson. Others have been adept in the art of spellbinding to a lesser degree, but the great Civil War President and his successor were orators in the best sense of the term.

Abraham Lincoln was not a born orator. His first political speech, made soon after he returned from the Black Hawk War and had become a candidate for election to the State Legislature, is witness to that fact. "Gentlemen and fellow-citizens," it ran, "I presume you all know who I am. I am in favor of a national bank. I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for this State Legislature. My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance. I am in favor of the internal improvement system and of a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If I am elected I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same."

Here was originality, but not eloquence. Lincoln was defeated, but again became a candidate for the position and made a stumping tour through Sangamon county. Those who heard him discovered that the man had expanded wonderfully, had acquired power, even eloquence of a homely sort. His talk went straight to the reason and hearts of his audiences. This time he was elected, and when the Legislature assembled at Vandalia he walked a hundred miles to join his colleagues. During the session, Lincoln was silent, listening, observant. When the session was ended he returned home on foot. It was about this time that a Sangamon county local politician declared at a party meeting, "Abe Lincoln ain't no spouter nor never will be."

But they returned him to the Legislature next year, and again he "footed it" to Vandalia. Here for the first time he met Stephen A. Douglas, who was to be his opponent in so many oratorical battles. At the age of twenty-three, the young Democratic politician was already a brilliant speaker. His skill as a debater inspired Lincoln to take issue with him, and from that moment the member from Sangamon county threw himself heart and soul into the business of meeting his young rival on his own ground. At once he took rank as an able debater and parliamentarian, boldly avowing his antislavery convictions and defending his position against all the skill his adversary could summon.

In 1847 the Sangamon district sent Lincoln to Congress. In all the vital questions of that critical period the new member took a decided part, and he left no doubt that he would follow his convictions wherever they might lead him. They led him, eventually, to deliver that series of immortal campaign speeches in which he pitted his strength against his powerful rival, Stephen A. Douglas. Lincoln's speeches at that time made him famous throughout the Union. His audiences were immense, sometimes numbering more than 10,000 spellbound men and women. Everywhere he proved his superiority both in intellectual power and in soundness of reasoning.

Intensely radical as he was, he had won a national reputation and was recognized as a party leader. Invitations to speak came from all sides. He went to Kansas and afterwards to New York and New England, everywhere captivating his great audiences whether they were gathered from the western frontier or from the polished and cultivated cities of the older sections of the land. At Cooper Institute, which was filled with those who had come to pick flaws in the man who was convulsing the country, his speech aroused unbounded enthusiasm. His audience of representative New Yorkers had expected to be entertained by the quaint, unlettered Western lawyer whose odd personality had been food for the caricaturists for many months, but it was thrilled into genuine astonishment and admiration. It was a forensic triumph such as no other man of the time had won. It clinched Abraham Lincoln's reputation as an orator of the first-class.

A Speech That Won the Vice-Presidency.

While Lincoln was electrifying the North with his convincing eloquence, another man of undimming courage and unsullied integrity, although opinionated, aggressive and obstinate, was rousing the people of the State of Tennessee into a frenzy of patriotism by his impassioned utterances. Some months prior to this, Andrew Johnson had stood alone among his political associates in the United States Senate and battled against the doctrine of State separation with a power of brain and speech that lifted him into immediate fame as an orator. He had worked faithfully along party lines until the prospect of Tennessee's withdrawal from the Union set all the patriotism of his powerful nature aflame.

Johnson returned to his home in Nashville a great orator, but a proscribed man. He had friends who were ready to die with him and a host of enemies who were plotting his destruction. Neither menaces nor danger could move him, and when he was kindled into boundless enthusiasm by his theme his fervid oratory, his strong, terse, even pungent sentences, carried his hearers with him in spite of their inborn prejudices or race and condition. In his strongest moments, his forceful personality, his passionate declamation and the courge and fire that made him reckless of any danger created a profound impression even on cool heads and strong intellects. The speeches of the loyal Tennessee Executive during his service as military governor soon made him a national figure.

October 24, 1861, Johnson made his famous address to a dense mass of the colored population of Nashville, with a sprinkling of whites who were in sympathy with the Union cause. Eyewitnesses declare that it was one of the most wonderful exhibitions of oneman power ever known to mankind. Everything combined to kindle the speaker's imagination and to bring out what was best in him. His speech filled his great audience with wild enthusiasm, and when the Governor reached his grand climax and proclaimed himself to be the "Moses who would lead the people from bondage into liberty and peace," the excitement that followed, the sudden access of joy that manifested itself in shouts and sobs and a babel of unrestrained exultation, baffled all description. That speech roused the nation to the knowledge that a great orator had come to the front, and it made Andrew Johnson Vice-President of the United States. Six weeks after he took his seat as presiding officer of the United States Senate he succeeded that other great orator upon whose golden speech perpetual silence had fallen.

Washington Lacked Fluency in Public Speech.

George Washington did not appear at his best in the role of public speaker. While he might not so appropriately have been called the "silent man," as was General Grant, it is a fact that he was never at his ease when called on to make a speech. In his later years he managed to acquire sufficient confidence in himself to deliver a short address with tolerable facility, but he confessed that he never rose to speak extemporaneously without symptoms of a recurrence of the tongue paralysis, which left him speechless when he rose to his feet in the visitors' gallery in the old Capitol at Williamsburg and attempted to reply in acknowledgment of the vote of thanks accorded him by the House of Burgesses for his gallant services in the French and Indian Wars.

The presiding officer of the Virginia legislative body—so the story runs—was equal to the occasion. "Sit down, Colonel Washington," he called out to the young soldier, who was powerless to utter a sound, "your modesty is worth more than a hundred speeches."

Yet Washington was not silent when the time came to speak. In every assembly in which Virginia freemen met to protest against the tyranny of England his strong, brief utterances had the ring of unfaltering courage, the suggestion of a struggle near at hand. But the most characteristic address ever made by that greatest American was on that solemn and pathetic occasion when he resigned his commission before a large audience assembled at Annapolis, Md., and craved leave of Congress to retire from the service of his country.

Neither of the Adamses, capable and scholarly as they were, was an orator. The father was a convincing speaker, but his style had none of the graces of oratory. As a lawyer his speeches were characterized by abundant good logic and sound judgment rather than by any approach to grace of language or delicacy of sentiment. Despite his lack of oratorical skill, he was easily the most influential force in the organization of armed resistance on the part of the Colonies. It was John Adams who prevailed on Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence, and likewise it was John Adams who made George Washington commander of the American army. The old Massachusetts statesman was a leader, a born leader in the full sense of the term, and he was recognized as such by the British government.

Only once is John Adams credited with having roused himself to positive eloquence. It was in the debate in Congress over the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. In that vital hour, some of his coworkers affirm, "the man seemed lifted out of himself." He appeared to have no idea of the grandeur of his effort, and was only conscious of the issues which hung upon the moment. It was a speech of thrilling earnestness, and he carried the body with him.

The younger Adams, one of the most cultivated men who ever reached the presidency, a figure whose moral grandeur has not been surpassed by any other in American history, had none of the magic of oratory. At the highwater mark of his political career he was a short, bald, elderly-looking man, with strong, rugged features, and eyes more or less inflamed. His high, shrill voice had no rich, deep tones to charm the ear and make their way to the heart. But when he spoke the man who had served his country so faithfully at home and abroad was sure of a large and interested audience. To support his arguments he marshaled his vast stores of knowledge, his pitiless invective, his scathing satire and his indomitable physical and moral courage.

There was no great orator among the Virginia Presidents. Born leader that he was, Thomas Jefferson was never at his best as a public speaker. In his younger days he made a tremendous effort to acquire the art, but he never mastered it. It was one of the bitter disappointments of his life that he could not control an audience as did his college friend, Patrick Henry. When Jefferson was a law student at Williamsburg he stood in the lobby of the House of Burgesses on the day when his friend made his immortal speech against Great Britain's attempt to tax the Colonies. He saw the tall, awkward figure rise in its place, with a shambling, embarrassed movement, and heard the first husky and faltering accents. But in a few moments a wonderful change came over the speaker. The passion of the orator was kindled and he stood erect and masterful before his audience. His homely face glowed, and there came into his voice the musical intonation that held his hearers spellbound. Fifty-nine years afterward Jefferson spoke of that scene with enthusiasm, and confessed that he would gladly have exchanged all his earthly prospects for the oratorical power of Patrick Henry.

Although Madison came to be regarded as the leader of the Republican party before he was thirty years of age, it was not on account of his facility as a public speaker. In that respect he was vastly the inferior of Alexander Hamilton, the brilliant leader of the Federalists. The scholarly Virginian and the clever New Yorker had been colleagues, but this new deal brought them into political antagonism. The atmosphere of controversy was especially distasteful to Madison, and in all his discussions he was the most courteous and conciliatory of political opponents.

The Speech That Got Monroe Into Hot Water.

James Monroe had no brilliant social or oratorical gifts, but his short, jerky sentences had a ring of sincerity and courage that made them of consequence. A notable example of this trenchant style is to be found in his orders to the Governors of the Southwest when England sent her great fleet to New Orleans to secure the mouth of the Mississippi. "Muster your militia to New Orleans," he commanded. "Do not wait for this government to arm them. Put all the arms you can into their hands. Let every man take his rifle with him. We shall see you paid." One speech made when he was minister to France gave him a celebrity which was not relished by some of his friends at home. It was delivered in the national convention at the close of the French Revolution. Monroe's instructions had been somewhat vague and large powers had been left to his discretion, there being no precedtn to guide him. As he rose in the convention, his fine, tall figure held erect, his frank blue eyes and fair hair in vivid contrast to the swarthy faces about him, the young American envoy attracted universal attention. In the excitement and emotion of such an hour Monroe's impulsive nature was carried away and his speech was more sympathetic with the new order of things in France than was prudent for his country. It was a speech which encountered great hostility at home. The Federal party seized the opportunity to denounce both the speech and the speaker. That first embassy was not a bed of roses for James Monroe.

William Henry Harrison was never regarded as an orator even by his warmest admirers. His most effective speeches in Congress were those in behalf of his beloved Northwest, in which he advocated its interests, called attention to its increasing prosperity and to the bright promise of its future. At such times his theme fired his soul and inspired his words, and he made a deep impression on his hearers. Despite John Tyler's brilliant career as a politician, he was not an orator, but he was a powerful and impressive debater. In the Senate he distinguished himself by his vigorous hostility to John Quincy Adams's administration. Zachary Taylor, unlettered frontier soldier and Indian fighter, was no more at home on the platform than with the pen. After his acceptance of the nomination to the presidency the party managers prepared his few communications to the public, and the old veteran made no attempt to shine as an orator. The best known speech accredited to him was made just before the battle of Buena Vista, when his command was almost surrounded by 20,000 Mexicans. "Soldiers," he called out as he rode along the ranks, "I intend to stand here not only so long as a man remains, but so long as a piece of a man is left!"

Andrew Jackson's First Speech in the House.

Andrew Jackson's first speech in the House of Representatives was against the address which Congress had prepared for General Washington at the close of his presidential career. Jackson had just come up from Nashville to Philadelphia on horseback, a distance of 800 miles, and it was his first visit to any centre of civilization. One who saw him at the time described him as "a tall, lank, uncouth-looking personage, with long locks of hair hanging over his face and a queue down his back tied in an eelskin." He wasn't at all abashed in the presence of his distinguished colleagues, but rose to his feet and expressed his convictions in regard to the proposed address "in some of the strangest idioms ever heard by mortal man." Later Jackson made a few speeches in Congress in behalf of certain claims of his State of Tennessee growing out of Indian wars on her territory. He satisfied his constituents, and the following autumn they sent him to the Senate. In the upper house he spoke infrequently. He often rose to his feet, according to records of the time, but found it impossible to speak, "owing to the rage which was sure to master him." Fire-eater that he was, his rage made him speechless.

Although Martin Van Buren had the shrewdness, the astuteness and the sagacity which are so essential in the make-up of a great political leader, he was not an orator. James K. Polk in early life achieved a wide popularity as a political speaker, and won the flattering title of the "Napoleon of the Stump," although it was not easy to recognize the appropriateness of the designation. He was a member of Congress for fourteen years, and seems to have been a frequent and rather popular speaker. Some of his best work in Congress was shown in defending General Jackson from the attacks of his political enemies. In 1840 Polk and Harrison were rival candidates for the governorship of Tennessee. They stumped the State together, "actually driving in the same carriage and sleeping in the same bed."

Millard Fillmore delivered a speech in the New York Legislature against imprisonment for debt, which established his reputation as a telling speaker at an early period of his career. In Congress he made many effective speeches, and in his canvass for the governorship and later for the vice-presidency he made good his reputation as a political spellbinder. Franklin Pierce was a fluent, graceful and polished speaker, and he was the possessor of a particularly happy knack of steering clear of the heat and acrimony of a political discussion. James Buchanan was in the lower house of Congress for ten years, and was regarded as an effective speaker.

When he was thirty-nine years of age, at a mass-meeting held in the Presbyterian Church at Hanover, Ill., to discuss war topics, Ulysses S. Grant was called on for a speech. He rose slowly, apparently suffering from great embarrassment, and after several efforts, managed to choke out: "Boys, I can't make a speech. I never made a speech in my life. But when the time comes to go to the front I am ready to go with you." On a few subsequent occasons the great soldier spoke briefly, but, with the possible exception of General Taylor, he was the most silent man who ever reached the presidency.

PENNED BY WALLACE·IRWIN

THE GREAT MAN'S PRIMER OR GUIDE to SUCCESS

PICTURED BY E·W·KEMBLE

"Children are encouraged to wear gold spectacles and side whiskers."

JAMES SCHOOLCRAFT SHERMAN

DO YOU like poetry?
No.
Here are a few lines of my own written aft-er a vis-it to the U. S. Senate:

Just a lit-tle sun-shine,
Just a lit-tle Jim,
Just a lit-tle pol-i-tics,
And that is Him.

Whom is the Him of which you speak of?

Hon. James S. Sherman, Vice-President of the U-ni-ted States.

I would rather be right than be (vice) President.

So would I. I would rather be almost anything.

And yet this man has a hap-py face.

Yes. His is the hap-pi-ness which comes of lead-ing a life with-out re-spon-si-bil-i-ty. Public jobs do wear a man down. And Jim has al-ways been grateful for the fact that the Am-er-i-can peo-ple re-tired him in-to private life when they e-lect-ed him Vice-Pres-i-dent in the year 1908. He is the on-ly free man in the world, because he act-u-al-ly gets paid for do-ing nothing. Ev-en the King of Spain has to change his un-i-form once or twice a day. But the Sen-ate would not care if James came down to work in the morn-ing in a suit of cot-ton pajamas.

Such is the in-dif-fer-ence of our great Leg-is-la-tive Body.

Yet there is no so such thing as real hap-pi-ness in this world.

Has Jim his sad mom-ents?

He has. Some-times, when Sen-a-tor La Fol-lette is making a long speech and Jim has nothing to do but think of some-thing else, he sud-den-ly re-mem-bers that he may not al-ways be Vice-President.

And what will become of him then?

Then his fellow towns-men will get hold of him and e-lect him May-or of U-ti-ca.

Will this job be un-pleas-ant to James?

Will it? Why, the May-or of U-ti-ca has to do twice as much work in a day as falls to the lot of the Vice-President in the course of a whole ad-min-is-tra-tion.

Do the U-ti-ca boys think that Jim is some shucks?

To them James is more shucks than you will find under a grand-stand af-ter a Nat-ion-al League Game. In U-ti-ca the drug-stores are named "Sunshine Pharmacy" and the sa-loons "Jim's Place." Children are en-cour-aged to wear gold spec-ta-cles and side-whisk-ers and are oft-en told that, if they are good and go to school and save their mon-ey, they may be Vice-President some day.

Do the U-ti-ca boys ev-er go to Wash-ing-ton to look up Jim?

They are surprised to find that they do not have to look far up when they look up James in Wash-ing-ton. They go to the door-keep-er of the Sen-ate and ask, "Is the Vice-Pres-i-dent in?" "How should I know?" asks the funct-ion-ary. "What's his name?" "Sherman, James Schoolcraft Sher-man," say the U-ti-ca boys in hor-ror at his ig-no-rance. "There are so man-y Vice-Presidents one can-not keep track of them all," says the door-man, "but there is a Vice-Pres-i-dent in the chair at pres-ent, I think." "We want to talk to him," say the Boys. "He is not per-mitted to see vis-i-tors dur-ing office hours," says the snippy pot-en-tate, lead-ing the strang-ers to-ward the press gal-lery.

So the boys from U-ti-ca wander a-round all day see-ing the other great mon-u-ments of our mag-nif-i-cent Cap-i-tal. The Wash-ing-ton Mon-u-ment they ad-mire, but they do not think it so fine as the J. S. Sher-man stat-ue in U-ti-ca. The Treas-u-ry Build-ing looks good to them, but not half so im-pos-ing as the State Bank in which Jim is in-ter-est-ed.

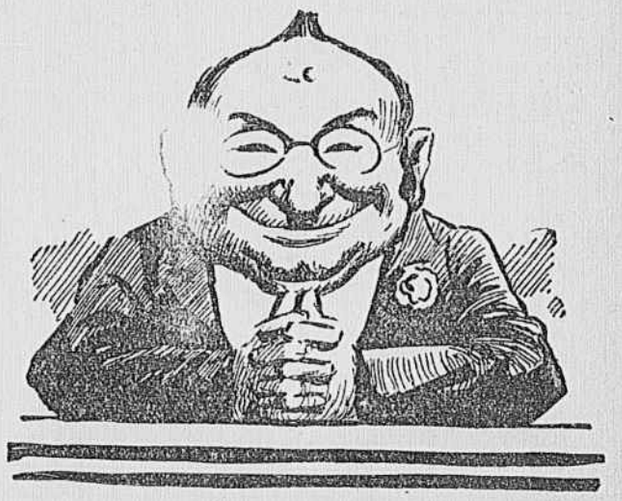
Final-ly, at night, they wand-er back to the New Wil-lard Ho-tel. Walk-ing proud-ly up to the bar, they say to the mix-ol-o-gist in at-tend-ance, "We are friends o' the Vice-President." "You can't get a drink on the strength of that!" exclaims the cru-el art-ist, point-ing his cocktail shak-er in the op-po-site di-rection.

Do they fin-ally see Jim?

Yes. Aft-er the Sen-ate is ad-journed and James is per-mit-ted to wan-der at large, the U-ti-ca Boys meet him and con-gra-tu-late him on the fine way he compelled the Sen-ate as one man and com-pelled the Re-pub-lic-an Par-ty to live up to its prom-is-es.

Teach-er, I ob-serve the mor-al of this dis-course.
On the table with it!

"Truly Great Man."
o live up to its prom-is-es.



"He actually gets paid for doing nothing."